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Interviewer: My name is Alicia Mittelman; I'm a curator at the Estes Park Museum. Today is April 30, 2014. We are at the Estes Park Museum to interview Peggy Donahue for the Estes Valley Mountaineering Oral History Project, a joint effort between the Estes Valley Library and the Estes Park Museum. [This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Brian Brown. The interview was transcribed by Tom Williams with assistance from Alicia Mittelman.]

Can we start off with your full name please?

Peggy Donahue: Do you really want the legal name?

Interviewer: Whatever you're comfortable with.

Peggy Donahue: Peggy Donahue.

Interviewer: Peggy where were you born?

Peggy Donahue: I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Interviewer: Can you remember the first time you came to Rocky Mountain National Park?

Peggy Donahue: Oh of course! I was nineteen and I was not really anxious to get out of Oklahoma because I didn't know how really awful it was because I didn't have anything to compare it to. But I had a boyfriend and my parents were like, "Oh, get her out of town, they're too serious." I had an aunt who was a friend of the Manager of the Stanley Hotel at the time. They said, "Oh," because my parents had been out here on a business kind of a trip. They said, "Oh, you should go, you should go to Colorado and Aunt Jane can get you a job at the Stanley Hotel. It's beautiful." "Ok, I'll go." So I talked a girlfriend into coming with me and when we came into this area we were just, I mean this was not Oklahoma. Beautiful, beautiful, yeah I was blown completely away. I didn't want to go back to Oklahoma, I did go back but not for long.

Interviewer: How did you get here and about what year was that?

Peggy Donahue: Ok, now you have to do the math. I was nineteen and I'm sixty four, so that's it. So my girlfriend and I flew into the airport, we took a bus up to Estes and they got a little shuttle to us right to the Stanley. She was working in the, I don't remember, the house maid, housekeeping and I was

at the desk doing reservations and stuff. That's where I met Mike [Donahue]. He walked in the door. He was a friend of my brother's. I'm one of seven. So my brother who's just a year and a half older than I am was good friends of Mike out in Southern California. Crazy, crazy round and round but my brother went out there to wrestle on a wrestling scholarship at a junior college which happened to be where Mike was going to school and Mike liked to wrestle. He wasn't on the team but he liked to work out with them. Mike weighted 150; my brother was tiny, like weighed 115 or something. They got on the mat together, came in and the coach was like, "Donahue, Cremin get on the mat." They're like, "Oh my god." My brother's like, "He's big." Mike's like, "He's tiny." But they were like a match for each other. They couldn't do anything with each other and finally the coach was like, "Get off the mat you two." They were laughing and they were friends, instant friends. So my brother was like, "You've got to meet him," and he was telling him, "You've got to meet her." So we met right here.

Interviewer: Mike would become your husband later. [Peggy Donahue: Yes.] So you met each other that first summer here in Estes Park, you were working at the Stanley and what was he doing in town?

Peggy Donahue: He was strangely enough working on the highway. At the time they were putting a new highway through, up there, Highway Seven. They were putting a new highway through. So he was like, much to his dismay, cutting trees, putting in a new highway. But it was him of course that took me up Longs Peak that summer. Took both my brother and I up Longs Peak. So Mike and his brother and me and my brother went up. In those days you could camp at Chasm Meadows. So we hiked in and camped in Chasm Meadows which was like beautiful. I mean Oklahoma, I hadn't done anything, no hiking, no climbing, nothing. I came out here and was just like, "What, I was born in the wrong place, this is perfectly fabulous. So we climbed Kiener's [Route], it was beautiful and then coming down we had to. So Mike and his brother went over the Camel over to get all the gear because we came down the North Face. So they went up over the Camel and said, "You guys just stay on the trail, you two Okies, we'll catch you down there on the trail." So the two Okies are like getting exhausted and "Oh, my gosh, let's just take a short cut. Well there's the trail down there, let's just cut through." I mean all those bushes; those krumholtz looked totally perfectly inviting from up above. We got in there and it was just brutal, oh my gosh, it was just like, "Aw"; I was asking my brother, "Do I look like death warmed up? Because I feel like it, oh my gosh." Finally we got down there and Mike and his brother were there looking at us going, "Why didn't you stay on the trail?" "Well, this looks shorter." And they had these extra packs that they expected us to carry. I put that pack on; I mean I was not a rugged mountaineer at that point. I was just like put that pack on and took it right off and said, "No way, I don't care what happens to this stuff, the pack, I'm not carrying it. Nope,

going down without any pack on.” So he was like, “Oh no, I guess I’m carrying two packs.” [chuckles] So he did. I don’t know.

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Interviewer: That’s taking on a lot; your first summer coming here and you hadn’t really had any other mountaineering experience before that.

Peggy Donahue: Not at all, yeah so it was awesome thought, I loved it but I was totally exhausted.

Interviewer: Well what happened next? Did you just stay in Estes Park; did you have to go back to school in the fall?

Peggy Donahue: I went back to school in the fall, but my heart wasn’t there. I just wanted to come back out here. So I went to school but I came back out the next summer and actually lived up there on the family property in a tent.

Interviewer: What family property?

Peggy Donahue: The Donahue, Mike’s family. Well it’s the Donahue-St. John-Bickel. So there’s three families. Mike’s grandparents bought the land, like 160 acres back in the early ‘30s. So of course there was this beautiful piece of land in the mountains so I just set up a tent on the property and his parents were awesome. We went hiking together all summer, me and his parents. Can’t remember what he was doing that summer, but anyway. Yeah I just stayed out here for the summer and then I didn’t want to go back to school, I wanted to stay here. So I didn’t go back to school but actually Mike went back to California so I thought, “Oh, I’ll go California too.” Went out there and thought, “What do I want to do? I wouldn’t mind being a nurse; I’ll try being a nurse’s aide, see if I like it.” So I was a nurse’s aide, my teacher was Florence Knight. Don’t you think that’s clever, could have been Nightingale, but it was Florence Knight. Yeah, so I was a nurse’s aide and didn’t take long. Mike and I got married and decided to come back out here.

Interviewer: What year did you get married?

Peggy Donahue: We got married in 1971 or 1970, one or the other. How old is Topher? Because Topher was born thereafter. We got married in November and Topher was born the following October. So yeah, we lived in tiny little cabin which is where I am now but it was tiny at the time. It was concrete block, cinder block, two rooms and not a pretty cabin but the area around the cabin was absolutely gorgeous. Aspen trees, all sorts of evergreens, so much prettier than the dust bowl of Oklahoma.

Interviewer: We describe that as being in Wild Basin [Peggy Donahue: It’s Wild Basin.] which is within the National Park.

Peggy Donahue: Well yeah, the National Park isn't far back from our cabin. We walked back to the Park one year and walked all the way down to our daughter's place in Southern Colorado, Del Norte. So it was just like walk out the door, walk to the Park, walk down all the way 360 miles to Southern Colorado, it was fabulous. Yeah, so we live right next to the Park, really pretty.

Interviewer: I feel like Mike is probably going to come up in the conversation quite a few times. [Peggy Donahue: Oh, he has too.] Can you describe him to me, what did he look like?

Peggy Donahue: What did he look like? He looked like Topher. I mean he really did look a lot like Topher. His eyes were bluer, we was a little bit shorter. Topher is now getting very clean cut because he's a papa and that didn't clean cut Mike being a papa, but it clean cutted Topher. Yeah, Mike had just crazy hair when I first met him. He wore these giant sized hiking boots, heavy, like not these light weight really cool go anywhere hiking boots. Heavy duty with the great big thick soles. Plaid shirts, working the woods, split wood, mountain man. [Interviewer: Mountain man.] Yeah, he was a true mountain man. But he didn't papa like Topher. Big beard though, Topher's getting this little thing going now but Mike always had like this full beard.

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Interviewer: Ok, that helps. In the first few years that you were here, did you go rock climbing very much?

Peggy Donahue: Yeah, a little bit. I have to say I really wasn't crazy about it, I found it scary and intimidating. So it took me a long time, it wasn't like yeah, it appealed to me right away. Mountains appealed to me right away, mountaineering and I loved that part of the climbing school, getting to go to foreign countries and climb those big peaks. I liked that. But the rock climbing took me a long time to find comfort. I thought it was really crazy and risky and scary and I for sure didn't want to lead and be responsible for myself and this other person or people on the rope. It took years and years and years and actually until the kids were grown and climbing on their own and stuff that I was like, "Alright, I guess it's time for me to do the same thing." So then I started learning how to place the gear and lead climb and of course I loved it. Particularly loved it after Mike left my life because it was such a release in such a focused way. Like nothing else did it, hiking was like too much freedom of the mind to kind of wander. I was like, "Climbing is the ticket because it focuses ever part of your being, body, mind, spirit is like right there." A little bit like yoga. But yeah, so that's kind of how that progressed. Yeah, Topher got into it big time early on. Nemonie, daughter, she was sort of like me, "I don't know, it's kind of scary." Tobias the youngest son, negative, never would do it, never wanted to go. One time he climbed out of his harness. He was down pretty

low on the rock and I hate to say I was the mean mom who was belaying him, but I was like, “Come on, come on Tobias, come on, come on, just give it.” “No I’m getting out of this harness; I’m climbing right off of here.” “No, you’re not.” [chuckles] and he did. He literally did, it was like, “Ok, he doesn’t climb; he’s not a climber, that’s ok, that’s ok.”

Interviewer: Through your business and I want to talk a little bit about the Colorado Mountain School. You and Mike brought a lot of people into the climbing world and taught them how to do it and how to enjoy it. Can you Peggy, can you describe the services you offered at the Colorado Mountain School?

Peggy Donahue: Well Mike’s whole thing, he was a total people person, I mean that was his main thing; he just was so into people. Anybody, any age, any culture, any race, any financial status, it didn’t matter he was just into people and he just immediately was interested in them. He wasn’t so much talking about himself as trying to find out about them. So he kind of used the mountains as a, it was almost like therapy, it was like a therapeutic, the therapeutic use of the mountains for people rather than, “Yeah, let’s get you up this peak and let’s accomplish this big lofty goal.” It was like, “No, it’s more about, let’s find out what you’re made of and how you feel and who you are and let this medium be the way that you find out.” So he was way into that and the early guides that we hired were sort of like, “Yeah, yeah.” They were into that too, they liked that whole concept that whole theory. But as time went on, it was interesting to watch the people who came in to apply for guiding, it was like big egos. Big head, I want to be, I want to do this and I want to do that and I want to put this on my resume and I want to. They just weren’t the same kind of people, I know there are those kind of people and always have been, but it seemed like early on there were more of them and maybe we went through a stage where there were fewer of them and more people just into the ego trip of climbing and doing these first assents and whatever. All for the ego salve that it provided and maybe we’re getting more back into the other kind of people, I’d like to think. Yeah, the early years the guides just seemed really into that whole concept and were really good with the clients. And later on the guides just became a little less people oriented and more self-oriented. It seemed like, don’t tell any of the recent guides I said, no, no, I’m sure none of them would be. But yeah, it started to change a bit over the years.

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Interviewer: I’ll come back to that point in a moment but I want to find out more about how the Colorado Mountain School evolved from Fantasy Ridge. Was there a connection there between that guiding service?

Peggy Donahue: Yeah, well Michael Covington owned Fantasy Ridge and he wanted to sell the business and Mike Donahue was working for him as a guide. So a

bunch of the guides kind of wanted to go in as a cooperative and buy the school and Mike Donahue and Mike Covington sort of talked that over and both of them felt a little bit more comfortable with the idea of one person taking it over. So Mike Donahue ended up being that one person who took it over.

Interviewer: This was in the 1970s.

Peggy Donahue: Yes, this was when, let's see, actually we took it over in. See Tobias was born in '79; I have to go everything back to when a kid was born. So '79, '80, '81, like we probably bought it in like '82 I'm thinking. You can fact check me, but somewhere in there.

Interviewer: Alright, and then you guys, you named it a school. Was there a curriculum?

Peggy Donahue: Well you know it was a school because, yeah there's not a curriculum as such like when you go sign up for the Estes Park High School's curriculum. It was a very kind of open educational experience. So you could learn to rock climb, you could learn to ice climb, you could learn mountaineering skills, you could take all that on expeditions so that you combine all these things that you learned on a big mountain or whatever. So yeah, it was very educational in that sense, but also in the sense of, and I go back to this, of learning about yourself and that was kind of the big thing was really to help people draw from within. Learn about themselves; use this medium to find out more about who you are. So that was kind of the focus and why we kind of thought, "Yeah, to name it a school would be appropriate."

Interviewer: Yeah, I can see that. Who were your clients?

Peggy Donahue: Oh my gosh, people from all over, that was one of the coolest things. People from all over the country and even the world. It was interesting, we started doing these Mexico volcano expeditions because a Mexican man who wanted to climb Longs Peak got ahold of Jim Johnson who at the time had a little business called "Haze" and he made gear and stuff. He was in there in the enclave with Komito [Steve] and us.

Interviewer: On Davis Hill?

Peggy Donahue: Yes, yes, same place. So somehow this Mexican guy got ahold of him and said that he wanted to climb Kieners on Longs Peak and would Jim take him. And Jim was like, "Oh, I don't really guide but Mike Donahue, why don't you take him?" And Mike's like, "Oh yeah, I really don't speak much Spanish." But he said, "Well this guy has a friend, an older guy who's going to come with him who speaks pretty good English." "Ok." So they came out and the older guy had actually been born in the U.S. and lived in the U.S. until he was about ten, so he had pretty darn good English and he kind of schooled Mike on some Spanish words he'd need to know

for the climb and he schooled Chris Stovall the Spanish guy on some English words he'd need to know. So they took off and climbed Kieners and along the way they got to be good friends and Mike thought, "Gosh, you have those beautiful big 17,000', 18,000' volcanos, we could come bring clients down there and stay in your homes and you guys would benefit financially and you could teach us a lot about those mountains." So we started doing these trips and I think they still do it, Colorado Mountain School still takes these trips. I don't know who they stay with but, yeah, so we started the expedition part of the school with Mexico and branched out to Equator, Bolivia and Argentina.

Interviewer: How did you guys share the work load of owning a business, what was your role?

Peggy Donahue: Oh my gosh, it was funny in the beginning. I actually have a picture somewhere with a card table setup in the little tiny cabin, little folding chair, sitting there on a typewriter typing letters and stuff to people so we

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started out really basic, really really basic and then it grew to where. We actually started in the upstairs of, you know, where they are now, the Mountain School. We were upstairs in one of the rooms that is now a lodging room. So one little room was where we were. [Interviewer: Oh yeah, that's small.] It was slow, I can remember falling asleep up there, cause I would do a lot of the office kind of stuff, it was so slow. But then we moved out to the little out building, they've got that little out building there next to the big building and we were in half of that and Jim Johnson Hayes was in the other half. Then we moved into the whole upstairs of the big building and then we moved into the whole big building. So it was just this gradual progression of growing, grew bigger and bigger and bigger. My role, because I was having kids the whole time, well Topher and Nem were already, I don't know how old, Tobias was like three when we got the school so Nem was like eight and Topher was ten or so. But you know, dealing with kids in school and everything. So I was mostly just staying with the typewriter and then coming to the school once they were all in school, and being in the office. And then going out with some of the groups and I loved going on the expeditions so I would join up with those groups and go on the expeditions to Mexico and Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Alaska.

Interviewer: That sounds great. Africa.

Peggy Donahue: Yeah, it was the best part for me, I loved it, yeah I loved the travel.

Interviewer: It sounds like anybody that's been associated with your business gets a little misty eyed.

Peggy Donahue: Are you serious?

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Peggy Donahue: Oh, glory be.

Interviewer: There is some quality to your business where clients came back year after year and I don't know if it was just the perfect combination of your philosophy and the way that you interacted with people. Can you speak to that?

Peggy Donahue: I think that's a huge part of it. I think that philosophy was, it's so much more, it's not like it eliminates your, "I want to go climb this big mountain just to see if I can do it," or because "I do want to rack up a big list of big mountains I've climbed or bla, bla, bla." But it's more than that, so they could rack them up if they wanted to but along the way they would just be like learning about themselves, they would really just clamp onto this philosophy and it would add so much more to the experience than just getting to the top of a mountain. Because with this kind of philosophy, if you don't get to the top of the mountain you still had a wonderful experience and you learned a lot about yourself and you learned a lot about the people in the group and the mountain's still there. You can come back and try it again sometime. I think a lot of professional schools for climbing, and maybe that's changing too, but I think they used to be more into, "Get them to the top at all costs; they've got to get to the goal." You know, you've seen stories about people dying on the mountains trying to get to that summit, and sometimes Mike would turn around and a lot of the guides, any of us would turn around when the client was like, "I want to get to the top." We'd like, "Those clouds aren't going to let us get to the top and all the way back down safely, so we've got to come back another day." And then of course you'd get into this monstrous storm on the way down once you're in the trees going, "Aren't we glad we're down here not up there?" So yeah, no it was totally the combination of philosophy and just being tuned into the people instead of just tuned into the idea of getting up a mountain, yeah.

Interviewer: Correct me if I'm wrong too, but maybe because of Mike's family history in the area, I've heard that he often spoke about the guides that had preceded him. People like Enos Mills and Shep Husted. Does that sound accurate?

Peggy Donahue: Oh yeah, definitely. He was definitely feeling like a thread from all of those early guides on through. Not ever a break in it, like that's what those guides were about really, was taking people out there and exposing them to the natural world. Enos Mills was totally into that, getting up to the top



was nice little frosting on the cake but it wasn't why they went. They just went to be out there and experience the whole thing, the air, the trees, the rocks; whatever's growing and where it's growing. Just learning about the natural world was huge and that's what those early guides were way more about than accomplishing goals, getting up peaks, yeah.

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Interviewer: And as you mentioned earlier, guiding is not for everyone. We've heard from some climbers that they thought at one point or another, "Guiding would be great because I get paid to do what I love, I get to rock climb all day." And then they find out it's not just that, they don't get to maybe climb as much as they'd like at the level they want to and instead you really have to coach people through things that are scary for them. But again the uniqueness of the Mountain School was that you had some guides that came back year after year. How in your opinion did they stay motivated to be guides?

Peggy Donahue: I think those guides really liked the idea that they were helping, everybody likes, whether they realize it or not initially, they like to help other people. So they kind of got that pleasure and that joy from, and seeing a client year, after year, after year, come back and ask for them because they did such a great job with them. Getting into that person and what that person's goals were, needs were, fears were and how to work with them to get through those fears. And next year come back and like use what they gained last year to move on and do something maybe a little more technical, a little more exposed, a little more scary and yet be able to work with them to come through that fear and come out the other side like, "Yes I did it, this was awesome." I think that that made the guides feel good to be able to give that kind of a gift to other people and see it rewarded by that person coming back and saying, "I want that guide again."

Interviewer: Can you recall who some of those guides were that worked with you or for you that came back time after time?

Peggy Donahue: The guides?

Interviewer: Yes.

Peggy Donahue: Oh my gosh, well Bob Chase has been a guide for I don't even know how many years. Yeah he's still to this day has clients who are returning to him for I don't know how many years they've been coming back to climb with Bob. He's just the one they want. He was totally totally into that whole idea, no ego involved in it and just giving to that client, whoever that is, whatever they need, whatever they want at whatever level, and not down playing what their level is. Not making somebody feel like, "If you're climbing at this level, it's not really worth it." It's like, "It doesn't matter; it doesn't matter what level, where are you and how does that feel to you?"

Let's keep moving and let's keep exploring and gaining and benefiting from doing a little bit more. It doesn't have to be much, just a tiny bit more, see how you feel with that." Bob was spot on with all that and of course Todd Burke, spot on just people loved him. He was awesome. Bill Weiss who now lives in Manitou Springs, he's some sort of a, he's a nurse but he was great, just very gentle. The guides who were just very gentle and thoughtful, considerate, just like being a good person. Being a guide who's a good person just really was successful. The guide who was more interested in personal accomplishments, clients could feel that and just like, you don't really want to be with an egotist, you want to be with someone who's a good person and those guides shined, got repeat customers year after year.

09:05

Interviewer: I see. How did things evolve over the years? How long did you have the business for?

Peggy Donahue: We had the business from about '82 until probably '99 probably. Well you know, as it grew there just were more and more issues to be dealt with. It was kind of fun to sort of take something and build it up and grow it, and then it sort of becomes almost unwieldy. The possibilities, like so many guides and so many clients and so many possibilities for injury and the trust that you put in as an owner into those guides who are, you are putting people's lives in their hands. So it just became a little more stressful as time went on and it grew bigger. And happily we never had any major injury while we had the school which was really like, "Thank you very much." So yeah, but it did grow to an unwieldy place that was sort of like, "Oh my gosh, maybe this has gone beyond, we need to turn it over to somebody else now. Step aside, let somebody else do it." Mike kept guiding when John and Patty Bicknell took over with, what was the guy's name that bought it with them? He's going to kill me for not remembering but I can't remember, but anyway. Oh, and Bruce Andrews, there were four of them, John and Patty, Bruce Andrews. Bruce Andrews, another great guide who we lost up on, I think he died in a plane crashing on I think [Mt.] McKinley after we had already left the school and he was doing a trip up there and the plane crashed. He was an awesome guide, another one of those people type persons. So he was involved in the buying of the school and Ed Cruthers was the fourth guy. The brain works a little slower as years go by.

Interviewer: That's ok, you're doing good job.

Peggy Donahue: It's coming back a little bit. But so those, John and Patty ended up buying out the other two because they decided too, like, "Woo, owning it." It's like the difference between guiding and just climbing on your own and then guiding or owning the whole business. Another different step all together so John and Patty took it over and Mike guided for them for a

little while. Then we decided it was time to do our own thing and give it up to the younger folks.

Interviewer: In that time, or even today, have you seen changes in the climbing community?

Peggy Donahue: Well, there's been steady changes from the very beginning all the way through and ongoing. With any kind of activity there are going to be changes and of course there have been changes in what people can climb is so incredible. Back in the day we thought 5.10 was like "ah wow, really incredible hard climbing." Now 5.10, people climb that pretty routinely and climbing 5.12's and 5.13's and 5.14's. The gear, the changes in the gear have been so dramatic. I mean Mike did a trip on McKinley one year and he said, it was when all the synthetics were coming in. He said, "I'm going to do the whole trip in wool." So he wore wool nickers, these really funny wool nickers with patches, like double knees, double seat, these huge pants. Wool sweaters, wool everything, everything was wool and really stayed warm and he took great pride in like being able to climb it with all this weight. "This is great, it works. Wool is awesome; it's warm even when it's wet." Slowly but surely he kind of succumbed and started wearing the newer fabrics and all that stuff which, I don't know, you've got to love wool, it's just so wonderful and warm and soft and real, right off that sheep. Instead of I don't know what kind of petroleum strangeness goes into all these things we wear but.

Interviewer: And I think we're coming back to wool.

Peggy Donahue: I think we are too, yeah, I think we are too. You can't deny the warm quality, the coziness of wool. I hope so; I hope we're coming back.

Interviewer: Speaking of coziness, I want to talk about the cabin a little bit.

Peggy Donahue: Of course, the cozy cabin.

Interviewer: When you moved in there was there running water?

Peggy Donahue: No, no, when we moved in there it was the two rooms, there was no running water. There wasn't even so much as a sink. Mike's grandfather lived there and he was, he was just kind of a recluse philosophical guy who. He loved being in the mountains, he was kind of an Enos Mills philosopher thinking that the mountains would just change people. "Bring them to the mountains and they're going to learn something, they're going to gain, they're going to benefit and they're going to go back wherever they came from, they're going to be different. They're going to be better."

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Interviewer: What was his full name?"

Peggy Donahue: His name was, are you ready, Frank Salathio, I won't spell it, I don't know, Hannen.

Interviewer: That's Mike's grandfather.

Peggy Donahue: Yeah, Frank Salathio Hannen. They called him "Doc" because he really was a doctor but he didn't succeed a whole lot in the field because he couldn't bear to change people. He would just do the work for people, make them better and he'd say, "Aw, don't worry about it." Yeah, and he was a chemistry teacher, he taught down in Greeley. So we took over that little cabin which was his and there are other cabins on the property, there's probably a dozen cabins and a lot of them are pretty cute, little kind of log cabins. But they're kind of clustered down on one piece of the property and this one that we are in, that I'm in now is up on the hill and sort of isolated. So that appealed to Mike and to me and we just like, "We don't care if it's a funky looking cinder block cabin, it's really in a cool place." So moved in, no water, no sink, no anything and Mike's dad was a pretty good carpenter, he build all the houses they lived in as Mike was growing up. So he said, "You know I can put in a sink, I can put in some counters, I can put a window there so you can see out when you are doing the dishes." I'm like, "Perfect, what else would I need? It's great." So that was it, that's what we had, we had a sink. We hauled our water from Allenspark, from Crystal Spring. Sometimes in the winter we actually went down to, well even in the summer before you started to worry about giardia and stuff, we'd just go down to the river and in the winter we would chip a hole in the ice. We had these big kind of milk can looking things, we'd stick them down in there, pull them out. I've got photographs of us in like snow up to our, above our knees with these big old cans and like trying to haul them back up the hill from the river. [laughing] Yeah, we carried all the water into that cabin and then Topher was the first one along and we're in there in the cabin an then along came Nemonie right there in the cabin, along came Tobias right there and then I started thinking as those kids got older that maybe it would be nice. We didn't have telephone or anything, like we were just like in our own little world. As those kids got older, I mean still we hauled our water and took our baths in this big feed trough, horse feed trough, bring it in from outside. It was hanging on the wall, put it down, start with the youngest, heat water on the stove, dump it in. We always had electricity and we always had propane so we had lights and lame as they were because I think the family did actually run the cord from down from [the] main pole, electric pole up to this cabin so it was pretty weak. When the refrigerator came on the lights would all go dim, it was sketchy, it was definitely sketchy. So we had electricity and we had the propane and we'd heat the water. Start with the youngest, have our bath, keep adding more hot water as we went through. And we'd have guests, one Christmas we got carolers at the door. It was just this little tiny cabin and so we're all in there taking baths and the carolers are singing out the door. It's like, "Thank you, that was

lovely.” [laughter] Oh my gosh, but it was good, I mean Topher and Nemonie would take off on exploring trips, they would just take off and go down to the river, up to the beaver ponds. Those two were like two and a half years apart so they were always out there exploring. Tobias five years later Nem, was kind of more on his own. He’d explore but he’d stay a little bit closer to home, just out in the woods here. It’s crazy when you think that the bears are out there and the mountain lions are out there and it’s all out there but they never had any kind of problem, ever. That’s changed too though; the bears are not what they used to be. They used to run away, the bears would run away and now the bears try to get in to the houses.

Interviewer: Why was it important for you and Mike to raise your kids in that way?

Peggy Donahue: Oh, my gosh. It just felt so right; it felt so simple and so

19:35 [End of Part B.]

[C].

00:00

basic and everything down in the city just seemed so contrived and so excessive. Use so much water and so much of everything and I just loved, actually for the longest time I loved hauling the water and being aware of how much water I was using. “Hey guys, there’s only this much, you’ve got to conserve it. Yeah, drink all the water you want but like you just need a little bit to do this job or that job and don’t overdo it.” I think it was just really good for us to teach that to our kids, the importance of conservation. What better place to conserve, I mean you look around your environment, you say, “Do you want to save this or do you want to use it all up and have it destroyed? That’s kind of a no brainer.” So they all learned it, they learned it pretty well. I mean Tobias, the youngest who hated; the worst in the world hated the outhouse and all that, is actually living on Nemonie’s ranch. She lives on a cattle ranch in a cabin with an outhouse. Not to say that he wouldn’t like it to be a little different, but he’s like, he can do it. I mean you just learn to get by without having excessive amounts of everything. You feel stronger for it and empowered by it. So it’s all good, not that I mind having a bathroom now.

Interviewer: You earned it.

Peggy Donahue: I think I told you my carbon footprint is pretty good, small.

Interviewer: Well Peggy, is there anything else that you think is important for us to know?

Peggy Donahue: Gosh Alicia, I don’t know what it would be. I don’t know what it would be. Just really glad that the thread continues from those early times, those

early guides, Enos Mills, all the way through to today. We still have the Mountain School, we still have Bob Chase guiding for the Mountain School. So it's like really cool to have that continuity and it's still going.

Interviewer: Well thank you very much for taking time today.

Peggy Donahue: You're welcome, thank you Alicia.

2:20 [End of Part C. End of Interview.]

**Note:** Added material appears in brackets.

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**ABSTRACT:** Peggy Donahue describes the development of Colorado Mountain School, based upon the philosophical outlook of her husband Mike Donahue, which viewed the climbing experience as an opportunity to enhance individual personal understanding, growth and development and not just scaling mountains. Peggy describes the challenges and joys of living and raising a family in a very small cabin in the Wild Basin area, adjacent to Rocky Mountain National Park. The Donahue family and Colorado Mountain School are important links in the local chain of climbing enthusiasts, guides and naturalists which started perhaps even earlier than Enos Mills and continues to the present day.

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